



Single Parents And Security Blankets

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Among other things, a good marriage is a salve against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. It is also a shelter from the storm of Murphy's Law and, a safe haven of mutual support and security where we insulate ourselves from the impersonal and frightening unknowns of life as we chart our courses toward the future. Marriage is the quintessential security blanket in that it makes real the illusion that we are important and special and thus, will be cared for until death do us part. So, we venture out into a world of exciting and frightening tomorrows armed with a protective mantra, "No matter what happens everything will be alright."

In my private practice I have observed how marital crises that eventuate in separation and divorce rip these security blankets to pieces. In best cases, the loss of a spouse may for several years leave us at least, on occasion to re-experience ourselves as young children separated from our mothers minus our security blankets. Thus we can feel ill equipped to care for ourselves let alone to take on added responsibilities as a single parent.

The dangers of not creating adequate support systems for ourselves is that we may unwittingly project our insecurities onto our children and/or wear these insecurities on our sleeves so that our children get the message: "Please comfort mommy and daddy." The former pitfall may instill in our children the belief that the world of relationships outside the parent-child unit are dangerous and to be avoided. The latter may turn our children into our own security blankets and overwhelm them with obligatory responsibility to assuage our fears and insecurities. In either case, the inevitable outcome is that our children will be wracked by conflict over establishing separate identities from us and moving out into the world.

To avoid falling into this trap I recommend that we develop trusted, single parent support systems whose functions will be naturally internalized over time as the seismic shocks of separation and divorce subside. This way we can learn that we are not alone, these problems are universal and finally, there is hope in building bonds to others who may guide us on the road to new and satisfying lives with our kids.